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Kuk-Won Shin

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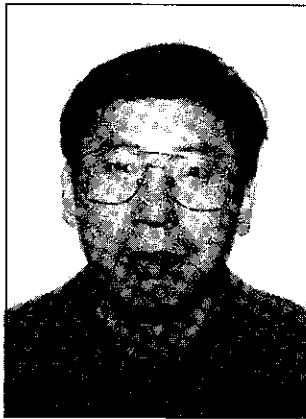
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# Postmodernism and a Christian Response

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by Kuk-Won Shin

**T**his essay surveys a recent development in Western philosophy, sketching what this development signifies for Christian higher education. This essay has five sections, the first, describing how Western philosophy has arrived where it is now, namely at the so-called "postmodern" discussion. The second defines postmodernism by explaining its core aspects. The third explains how this development in philosophy may be linked to Christian scholarship and Christian higher education. The fourth describes Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in order to show how

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*Dr. Shin pastors a Korean church in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He presented an earlier draft of this article to the Humanities Division of the College.*

a Christian thinker may respond to the development. The fifth and last examines how some North American Reformed thinkers have responded to postmodernism.

## The Road to Postmodernism

The rise of the so-called "postmodern" debate in philosophy is closely related to the general atmosphere in Western culture since the early 20th century. As David E. Klemm points out, "postmodernism arises out of the disillusionment with the modern ideals felt by European intellectuals after World War I."<sup>1</sup> Culture critics regard the twentieth century as the century of crisis. As early as the beginning of the third decade of this century, some scholars who were deeply shocked by the devastation wrought by World War I, the decline of morality, and the decrease of unity in society, began to write about a crisis in Western culture.<sup>2</sup> They exhibit a growing suspicion of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment's valuation of science. For them, the scientific foundation of modern civilization contains the seeds of the modern crisis.

According to their historical analysis, the world began to change in the seventeenth century when scientists like Galileo introduced the idea of "knowledge directed to the power of making, a knowing mastery of nature," i.e., technology.<sup>3</sup> This new worldview, bringing massive power and material benefits, has become perhaps the most influential and powerful worldview in human history. These same critics, however, wonder about the ideals of scientific culture. Their analysis of the

environmental crisis, as an inevitable result of an Enlightenment mentality, demonstrates their perspective clearly. Long suppressed suspicions about the defects of modern civilization have only recently begun to surface. Today, however, there is almost a flash flood of criticisms of the modern way of life.<sup>4</sup> The "closure of modernity" has become a topic of heated debate and people are beginning to talk about life after the collapse of scientific objectivism.<sup>5</sup>

This objectivism was originally inspired by the rise of modern science. Philosophy, too, felt the influence of this new worldview. Moreover, because it used to occupy the central place in learning and knowledge, the exclusive claim to objective truth made by science was particularly challenging to philosophy. Philosophers soon saw the need for a fundamental adjustment. This adjustment, resulting from the effort to reconcile traditional philosophy with the rising influence of science, was exactly what occurred in the early phase of modern philosophy.

Descartes exemplifies those who yielded to the acclaimed objectivity of modern science. He set about to reconstruct philosophy by articulating a new method. He abandoned medieval scholastic metaphysics as empty speculation and began a new philosophy consonant with science, which he believed would secure indubitable knowledge mathematically. Accepting mathematics as his model of "clear and distinct" knowledge, Descartes introduced the ideal of methodological certainty into philosophy.<sup>6</sup> According to this ideal, adhering strictly to objective method will secure the certainty of human knowledge and provide a reliable foundation for culture. From this perspective, the objectivity of science and the epistemological grounding of philosophy would provide the only sound defense against the menace of both skepticism and speculation. This scientific objectivism almost right away implied what is now commonly known as "foundationalism."<sup>7</sup> Modern philosophy wielding the yardstick of scientific method sought to provide theoretical justification for scientific knowledge. It saw its task as providing the theoretical foundation for all theories. As did Plato and Aristotle, philosophy once again assumed for itself the role of exclusive adjudicator for culture.

Modern philosophy supplied science with a forceful theoretical means to invade first the realm

of the "human sciences," and then that of praxis. This was accomplished by justifying the exclusive truth claim of science. According to this viewpoint, other ways of knowing, such as in the arts and religion, are either of secondary importance or must meet criteria set by scientific knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

It was the Enlightenment, then, with its famous maxim "Dare to use your reason (*Sapere aude*)" that solidified the absolutism of the modern philosophical worldview. This tradition of philosophy as epistemology, backed by the dominant Enlightenment spirit, lived on for centuries, pushing Western culture toward completing a scientific reformulation. This trend, spiritually and philosophically, reached its climax with the Hegelians. They devoted their philosophical inquiry to constructing a system that presupposed "the existence of an objective truth in terms of which the world could be seen as an 'expression' by the systematic philosopher."<sup>9</sup>

However, this tradition of philosophy, and especially as expressed in Hegelian "scientism" with the concomitant objectivistic ideal of truth and culture, did not go unchallenged. Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Dewey, and finally Heidegger, just to give a few examples, objected to the scientific ideal of objective truth as dogmatism. For them, "truth is frail and human, more a matter of 'truth-for-us' than 'truth-as-such.'"<sup>10</sup> Naturally, an irreconcilable conflict existed between those who supported these challengers and people who were committed to the Enlightenment and its objectivist-scientistic vision of life. The latter resisted such challenges, mostly because of the implied relativism.

The conflict between objectivistic scientism and subjectivistic relativism is inherent in this twofold legacy of the Enlightenment. On the one hand, there is daring, that is, daring to know and do everything according to the scientific method, an attempt at unity and objectivity; on the other hand, there is the never ending search for freedom of individuality and subjectivity.<sup>11</sup> This was the essence of the modern dilemma. Thus, we found ourselves, in a culture in which science and its technological application increasingly had the final word in almost everything. But scientific rationalists had never really been able to refute the fundamental challenge posed by critics. Clearly, bolstering science was a poor substitute for the original purpose of philosophy. It was

understandable that people like Kant, Hegel, and Husserl desperately attempted to recover the lost privileged status of philosophy. For example, Hegel suggested that "philosophy should resume its task of providing the foundations for all the sciences under its own leadership." But Hegel's attempt, as well as the attempts of Kant and Husserl, ultimately failed.

As a result, the realm and role of philosophy today, if there should be any at all, appears much more limited. Or as Richard Rorty argues in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, many thinkers now feel that philosophy must acknowledge its misunderstood role.<sup>12</sup> Rorty's claim reflects well the thrust of the so-called postmodern sentiment against the old faith in philosophy as the science of sciences which provides the foundation of culture. As the editors of *After Philosophy* point out, even philosophers realize that philosophy is at a turning point. Things philosophical cannot simply go on as they have.

### Characteristics of Postmodern Thinking

The postmodern development of philosophy is hard to judge for at least two reasons. First, the development is currently in progress. We are already living in a postmodern period. The change in philosophy reflects a general change in culture. Postmodern philosophy is only a part of this large picture. We are very much in the middle of this movement and we cannot foresee its ultimate outcome.<sup>13</sup> Even the meaning of the word "postmodernism" is not well defined yet. It is still defined as something that comes after what we know as the modern, scientific, positivistic, and metaphysical era.<sup>14</sup> However, even this definition suggests a decline of the order that we have been accustomed to for centuries. Therefore, it marks the most significant paradigm shift in philosophy since the time of Descartes.

Secondly, the postmodern development of philosophy is by no means a unified movement. Just as what we generalize as modern philosophy is in fact a complex development, so is postmodernism. The names used to refer to it show its broad nature. It is described variously as being post-scientific, post-positivistic, post-philosophical, or post-metaphysical.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, a few of the important and pervasive characteristics of postmodernism can be articulated.

First, postmodernism is anti-metaphysical, reacting against "the tradition in Western philosophical thinking, traceable to the Greek classical thinkers, of creating a metaphysical world of objective truths that stands opposed to the real physical world."<sup>16</sup> The anti-metaphysical orientation of postmodernism is well reflected in the "linguistic turn" it presupposes. Postmodern thinkers departed both from a traditional ocular metaphor for knowing as the representation of reality to the human mind and from philosophy as an introspective, psychological investigation. Instead of investigating the nature of ideas, substances, and universals, postmodern thinkers examine language, a medium of inter-

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subjective communication and understanding. As Klemm says, "at the center of the postmodern paradigm is neither the manifestation of the sacred nor rational self-assertion, but the linguistic event of dialogue."<sup>17</sup> In this connection, much in the postmodern thinker's method of philosophizing is phenomenological and sociological rather than psychological, analytical, transcendental, and epistemological.

Secondly, postmodernism criticizes the subject-centeredness of modern philosophy. This is related to the linguistic turn. With the linguistic turn, hardly any postmodern thinkers regard "the subject of knowledge and action as punctual, atomistic, disembodied; none understands rational autonomy in terms of an ideal of total disengagement; none appeals to immediate, intuitive self-presence as a sensible ideal of self-knowledge."<sup>18</sup> For them, the subject is not a dominant center of knowing which stands over against the object. They acknowledge that there is no knowledge without a background—history, prejudice, schemes, ontological givens—and that that background can never be wholly objectified. In this sense, postmodern thinkers are "fallibilists and finitists."<sup>19</sup>

Thirdly, compared to the abstract metaphysical tendency of modern philosophy, postmodern thinkers consider practical, ethical, socio-political dimensions to be integral parts of the task of

philosophy. This focus is implied in the linguistic turn since the turn implies a recognition of the intersubjective and communal nature of knowledge. This focus is also the result of departing from the idea of an ahistorical, individualistic, and autonomous reason. Postmodern thinkers do not suppose that constructing theories is to be alienated and free from its praxis. For them, philosophy is not merely abstract theory but is related to society and politics. For example, Gadamer's hermeneutics ultimately intends to show the importance of practical reasoning, which he thinks is being lost in the modern world due to the domination of methodological scientific reasoning. On this basis, he argues that philosophical hermeneutics is the modern heir of Aristotle's practical philosophy.

Fourthly, postmodernism is anti-Enlightenment and anti-humanism. Postmodern thinkers oppose the Enlightenment, which asserts human autonomy and trusts scientific objectivity as the foundation of culture. However, this statement needs to be qualified. Postmodernism is anti-Enlightenment in so far as it opposes the Enlightenment tradition supported by modern philosophy. Yet, deep in its motives, most postmodern thinkers still assert, in very subtle and obscure ways, some of the ensuing ideals of the Enlightenment: human autonomy, freedom, the power of critique, emancipation—although they qualify these words with much less humanistic notions. While being critical of modernity, postmodern thought is nonetheless deeply indebted to the ideals of the modern age. In that sense, postmodernism is the continuation of the modern.

### **Why Christian Scholars Need to Be Aware of Postmodernism**

Christian scholarship must be aware of postmodernism for two reasons. On the one hand, negatively speaking, it is unavoidable. Human thinking is not only internal and individualistic. Learning comes from outside, from others. This itself shows why we need to know what is going on. Being socio-cultural creatures by nature, human beings are unavoidably living in mutual influence. The Christian cannot stand outside of this cultural influence. While we are not of the world, we must not forget that we are in the world. This is our reformed principle. We also have to realize that whether we like it or not, our actual life is profoundly influenced by the world in which we live.

As believers we are called to test the spirits of our age by the Spirit's sure Word. This involves gratefully acknowledging genuine insight into creation but also criticizing a movement's distorting influence.

Postmodernism has some positive aspects, for example, its critique of the humanistic Enlightenment with its dogmatic rationalistic objectivism. In postmodern thought, philosophy has reached a substantial degree of self-critique. In many cases it has even moved beyond critique to destruction (Rorty and Derrida). For people who have faith in the foundation of philosophy and science, this brings a crisis (Heidegger).<sup>20</sup> And this sense of crisis is the essence of the postmodern debate: How can we overcome the crisis? Should we reformulate and continue the tradition? Should we radicalize the crisis? This element is significant for Christians since they have battled humanism and Enlightenment since the eighteenth century.

There are negative aspects of postmodernism as well. In particular we must recognize the danger of the relativistic overtone of some radical postmodern thinkers. Such a relativism implies many potential dangers. For example, by justifying the status quo it may invite despotic dictatorship and political oppression, deepen the decline of morality, and contribute to social disintegration.

On the other hand, positively speaking, we are called to be engaged with the world in which we are living. As we may remember from the examples of the early apologists and especially Augustine's *City of God*, genuine Christian scholarship always arose from a deep desire to engage contemporary challenges. In particular, those who cherish the Reformed tradition should not be defensive or passive, or especially not indifferent. For example, Dooyeweerd in analyzing the roots of Western culture, tried nobly to show how we as Christians inherit a distinctive understanding of the foundation of our existence (creation-fall-redemption motive) and to show how we can challenge another understanding of culture. I believe that this sense of calling is still a living tradition in Reformed circles. Let us listen to what a contemporary Reformed confession says about our situation:

But rebel cries sound through the world: some, crushed by failure or hardened by pain, give up on life and hope and God; others, shaken, but still hoping for human triumph, work feverishly

to realize their dreams. As believers in God we join this struggle of the spirits testing our times by the Spirit's sure word.<sup>21</sup>

Having confessed this about the situation, Reformed Christians cannot ignore what is happening in philosophy, since it has such potentially enormous implications. The trend in our culture is turning toward postmodernism. This shift will result in a very different world than the world of modernism. Therefore, we must be able to understand it in order to cope with it. Postmodernism, just like other philosophical thought, is a movement of ideas which can be analyzed, challenged, engaged in dialogue, and changed. The Christian must be engaged in the process with its unique truth—the public truth of the gospel.

In fact, as Harry Fernhout points out, postmodernism provides an opportunity for the Christian to be involved actively.<sup>22</sup> Postmodernism is characterized by its dialogical search for answers and new direction. It is more open to the Christian voice than any other philosophical thought that has existed in the Western intellectual tradition. Therefore, it is a good time to be involved. Also, more importantly, for those who are called to be educators of future generations, actively engaging with the postmodern development of philosophy is required in order to be fair to our students who will be more directly and deeply affected by these movements. The job of educator is to equip students. To equip students, we need to do our best to understand and inform them about postmodernism and equip them to challenge it.

### **Gadamer as an Example of Christian Response**

Hans-Georg Gadamer, known best for his philosophical hermeneutics, provides a good model of a Christian response to the postmodern development.<sup>23</sup> His major work, *Truth and Method*, was considered to be the most important study in philosophical hermeneutics. It inspired many philosophical exchanges, including his debates with both Habermas in the 1970s and Derrida in the 1980s. These debates situate Gadamer at the center of postmodern discussions.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is not a new methodology of epistemology or social sciences. Instead, his concern is to show that when rationalistic methodological epistemology

dominates, it reduces knowledge and life. He points out that methodological epistemology is based on the worldview of humanistic Enlightenment with its ideal of autonomy, objectivity, and rationalism. He argues that the autonomous and objectivistic idea of knowledge is based on the Enlightenment's prejudice against prejudices. Instead, he sees human reason as a participant in play and conversation, not as the autonomous dictator of truth.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, in the critique of objectivistic and rationalistic philosophy, implies culture critique. It focuses on "rationalization" and its reductionistic implications for life and society; on instrumental reason and the loss of prac-

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tical reasoning, freedom, identity, creativity, and sense of responsibility; and, along with these, on the decline of individual and social ethics; both are essential to human nature, according to Gadamer. The significance and the potential contribution of Gadamer's hermeneutics for the formation of postmodern culture lies mainly in his project of recovering the "philosophical" foundation of life. Gadamer proposes this transformation of philosophy as the remedy for the cultural crisis effected by the collapse of the objectivist methodological foundationalism and the subsequent rise of relativism. Thus, his project involves an apparently paradoxical and ambitious attempt. On the one hand, it tries to avoid the old scientific foundationalism. Yet, on the other hand, it opposes the radical movement of "the end of philosophy" by suggesting an alternative foundation of life with hermeneutics. In short, his philosophical project may be summarized as an attempt at a philosophical theory providing a non-foundationalistic foundation.

Compared to other postmodern critiques, Gadamer's approach and his philosophical position imply a new understanding of reason, man, and culture that is congenial to a Christian worldview.<sup>24</sup> His emphatic efforts to recover the original idea of reason as a responsive agent is a good example.<sup>25</sup> He insists that modern foundationalism fails because of its inability to fulfill its promise—namely the ob-

jective foundation of knowledge and culture. Thus, he shows that a philosophical rationality, be it theoretical, methodological, or practical reason, is inherently unable to provide the foundation consisting of universal norms, laws, and rules of knowledge. Moreover, Gadamer's project centers on confirming what he calls the "theoretical ideal of life," the "paradigm of being," or what others call universals, norms, or *logos*. In a sense, his phenomenological ontology of arts, play, and language is an effort to show the existence and priority of the foundation of life and the passive and responsive nature of human rationality.

This particular aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutical-ontological thinking appears to some critics as more similar to theology than to philosophy. For example, Caputo opposes Gadamer's hermeneutics because of the ontological orientation. According to Caputo,

What Gadamer offers is a theory of deep truth or deep essence—where the function of the "deep" metaphor is twofold: (1) it sees to it that the essence is deep enough to forbid definitive formulations or final, canonical versions—the only canon is the longevity and vitality of the tradition itself, and (2) it insures that beneath the multiplicity of historical formulations and multiple applications there rests an underlying, undying truth, deeper than we can say, too rich to be exhausted in a single try, too deep to be tapped in a single draft, but always keeping watch over the multiplicity of forms, seeing to it that they do not get out of hand.<sup>26</sup>

Caputo then argues that Gadamer's affirming a "very liberal, non-teleological, non-hierarchical version of a fundamentally conservative, traditionalist, essentialist idea" is the very reason why his hermeneutics is so attractive to theologians.<sup>27</sup> Also, Klemm brings out the same characteristic of Gadamer's hermeneutics by focusing on its speculative ontology. Klemm even insists that Gadamer's "speculative ontology" can be very easily overturned to theology.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the allegedly "theological" nature shows that Gadamer's hermeneutics involves something more than "philosophical" efforts, despite his emphatic claim of the "philosophic" nature of the project. We need to see clearly that what critics like Caputo refer to as a "theological" element is Gadamer's unconditional affirmation of the "deep

truth" or the "theoretical ideal of life" as the foundation of life. In other words, Gadamer's unconditional affirmation of the foundation is an act of faith which properly belongs to a different dimension of life than that of theory and philosophy. Such a willing affirmation of the existence and priority of the "deep truth" seems to indicate that even Gadamer himself recognizes that the "hermeneutical-philosophical" dimension depends on a more fundamental dimension, which I refer to as the "religious" dimension.

However, I have a strong reservation about those who believe that Christians may simply adopt Gadamer's hermeneutics as the theoretical-philosophical foundation for Christian theology or for theories of culture. For example, I disagree with Robert P. Scharlemann and David Klemm who seem to suggest that Christians just need to add a theological dimension to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.<sup>29</sup> Their approval of Gadamer's philosophical project is insufficiently critical, and does not strike me as even a proper response to what Gadamer proposes as the hermeneutical way or dialogical approach. Contrary to their approach, I interpret the approach as a call to be faithful to one's own viewpoint while being willing to welcome others' insights appreciatively. Therefore, my question is whether or not one should simply adopt Gadamer's philosophy and use it as the foundation for developing a distinctively Christian view of knowledge, truth, ethics, culture, and society.

Taking this perspective makes me realize that a certain difficulty remains since Gadamer perceives the foundational "religious" dimension to reflect a "theoretical" nature, due to the Greek "philosophical" prejudice. This is not merely a matter of referring to the same reality with a wrong name. This confounds the situation since considering the "theoretical" aspect of life as the foundation of life results in privileging one aspect of life as the ultimate foundation. Gadamer's identification of the foundational "paradigm of being" as the "theoretical" ideal of being entails many typical errors related to the age-old "philosophical" prejudice, namely rationalism, idealistic reductionism, optimism, and elitism. These have been the fundamental difficulties with which the legacy of the classical Greek philosophy has afflicted almost all philosophers, scientists, and even theologians of

Western intellectual tradition.

Therefore, the only way to move Gadamer's hermeneutics beyond the "philosophical" prejudice is to search for a tradition that correctly perceives the "religious" nature of the foundational dimension of life, and to supplement the "religious" dimension to his perspective. Here we may think of a possible fusion between Gadamer's hermeneutical horizon and the traditional Christian horizon, which clearly affirms the "religious" nature of the foundational dimension of life. Traditional Christians have trusted God's ordinances, which are revealed through the Scriptures and the creational order. These are the very foundation of existence, and so include human knowledge and culture. Such an attempt to supplement the Christian version of a "religious" dimension would likely be favored by Gadamer for the following reason.

There may be two kinds of objection to the usefulness of such an attempt. *First*, one may argue that since Gadamer is a Christian and has already integrated Christian elements into his hermeneutics, such a fusion would either be unnecessary or futile. Gadamer has already integrated many Christian elements in his hermeneutics. For example, he turns to "theology-like" speculative ontologies such as the centrality of the *Sache* in understanding to explain the core ideas of his hermeneutics. He also draws upon some Christian ideas, such as "*verbum*" and "incarnation," in order to show how the *Sache* comes into language.<sup>30</sup> This is possible only because Gadamer's basic framework of hermeneutics is congenial to the biblical worldview in many respects. Again, Gadamer's affirming the foundational ideals of life compares more closely to the Christian's perceiving of God's ordinances as the foundation of existence, than either the Enlightenment idea of absolutely sovereign subjectivity as the sole maker of truth or the deconstructionist denial of the possibility of the foundational truth. Moreover, Gadamer asserts his openness to any tradition for dialogue. Since Gadamer also expresses hope to broaden his horizon by a fusion with even non-Western thoughts, there would be no reason for him to object a further integration of his philosophical perspective with a biblical point of view.

However, despite the many Christian elements of Gadamer's hermeneutics, his noble efforts to preserve and revive the best of the Western tradition are clearly unsuccessful in overcoming the fun-

damental "philosophical" prejudice.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, an important characteristic in such an attempt of fusion is to clearly recognize what is uniquely available in the Christian worldview to overcome the weaknesses of a Greek philosophical perspective. Christian elements play only a minor role in formulating Gadamer's hermeneutics and his philosophy of culture. It will be helpful, therefore, to point out what Gadamer fails to appreciate among certain important elements of the Christian worldview in order to overcome the problematic "philosophical" prejudice.

*Secondly*, one may still ask whether it is possible to distinguish the Christian tradition from the Greek

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philosophical tradition. It may be argued that historically, despite the differences in theory, the Christian tradition and the Greek philosophical tradition practically combine together as the Western tradition. Realizing Gadamer's Christian background does not make this question unnecessary or superfluous. Instead, the question seeks to find careful ways to appreciate Gadamer's valuable insights without being uncritical of the non-Christian elements, especially the Greek philosophical influence, of his thought.

#### **Christian Options and Its Potential Contributions**

Instead of attempting to deal directly with these objections, I prefer to show how certain Christian philosophical movements successfully distinguish and maintain unique Christian elements in their philosophical enterprises. Also, I would like to suggest that, due to the Christian elements, these movements are able to propose substantially superior suggestions, since they are engaged in the "philosophical" dialogue with other contemporary schools of philosophy on the issue of overcoming the crisis of our culture. In the recent process of adopting the philosophical ideals of Dutch Neo-Calvinist tradition into the North American scene, two separate movements, namely Reformed



Epistemology and Reformational Philosophy, have emerged.<sup>32</sup> In their desire to develop Christian epistemology and Christian worldview respectively, they are fully aware of the significance of the postmodern development in philosophy and actively participate in the philosophical struggle for developing a non-foundationalistic view of knowledge and culture. Their pursuit of a new way to ground life and culture against the modern scientific foundationalism is increasingly proven to be worthy in the "postmodern conversation."<sup>33</sup>

Obviously the uniqueness of these movements lies in their efforts to present certain elements of the Christian tradition in the postmodern conversation. Due to the fundamentally similar nature of their project against both foundationalism and radical deconstruction, the basic strategy of Reformed Epistemology and Reformational Philosophy demonstrates certain similarities with the strategy of some contemporary thinkers, particularly of Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology. Reformational philosophy, for instance, to which I will limit my comments, affirms the normativity and priority of what it calls "Law" or "Word of God" over the human response to it. Accordingly, reason is considered to be an agent that "*sub-jects*" itself to the "Word." Reason is seen as a dependent agent. It is dependent, rather than absolute and autonomous, in response to the "Word of God."

However, in the effort to present the unique elements of the Christian tradition, Reformational philosophy is clearly different from Gadamer's philosophy at least in one aspect. It is Reformational philosophy's insistence that the foundation of life is "religious" in its nature. It insists that the foundational principle of life, that is, the Word of God or Law has a religious nature. In this respect, Reformational philosophy represents what Christians have held. Christians do not limit the way of knowing God's ordinances to a methodological epistemology. Therefore, Christians can sympathize with Gadamer's effort to seek out a non-foundationalistic ground of knowledge and life. However, biblical tradition maintains that the fear of the Lord, in listening to God's laws and responding to it with trust, is the beginning of wisdom.<sup>34</sup> This ideal of wisdom entails a perspective on life fundamentally different from that of classical Greek philosophy. Among the many differences between the biblical idea of wisdom and the Greek idea of *Logos*, it is

significant to note that Christians do not view wisdom as fundamentally theoretical in nature. Neither does the Christian tradition perceive the response to God's ordinances as primarily theoretical. Consequently, the Christian tradition presents an alternative "prejudice."

Thus, for Reformational philosophy, the Word of God is addressed to one's *entire* existence. The Word of God is by no means limited to the theoretical ideal of life. Instead, it encompasses the principle of the physical, biological, emotional, psychological, economical, historical, social, cultural, theological aspects of life as well as the theoretical aspect of life. At the same time, Reformational philosophy also maintains that human activity in every aspect of life, including theoretical and rational, is guided by what it calls the "religious ground motive." The religious ground motive is "a spiritual force that acts as the absolutely central mainspring of human society. It governs all of life's temporal expressions from the religious center of life, directing them to the true or supposed origin of existence."<sup>35</sup> In short, Reformational philosophy argues that the foundation of life is seated in the relation between the Word of God and the human religious response to it. Quite naturally, Reformational philosophy not only affirms that "without the horizon of faith no human endeavor either exists or is possible,"<sup>36</sup> but it also specifically recognizes that "religion is necessarily a central factor in all philosophizing."<sup>37</sup>

The strength of this view is that it rejects the error of singling out the theoretical dimension of life as the foundational dimension. Therefore, it does not imply the optimistic and elitist hope of solving various kinds of practical and cultural problems by appealing to the theoretical principle of life. In comparison, Gadamer's hermeneutics dwells on optimism when it prescribes a philosophical remedy for the crisis of our culture. As we have seen, the hermeneutical overcoming of the conflict between "nature" and "freedom," between theory and praxis, and between science and ethics has certain value. However, its validity is limited and far from sufficient to solve the crisis of our culture, because the core problem of today is not primarily theoretical. As Gadamer himself made clear, the crisis of our culture is rooted in the collapse of foundationalism and our inability to cope with it. This is a spiritual crisis concerned with the foundation

of life. Thus, due to its allegiance to the Christian tradition, Reformational philosophy is able not only to avoid the philosophical prejudice of the Western intellectual tradition, but also to suggest both how to understand the crisis of our culture more accurately and how to approach a solution with much broader relevance.

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#### END NOTES

- 1 David E. Klemm, *Hermeneutical Inquiry*, Vol. I, 19.
- 2 Various scholars, such as Ernst Troeltsch, Oswald Spengler, Pitir A. Sorokin, Arnold Toynbee, and Christopher Dawson, believed that the dark reality of the twentieth-century crisis

was so overwhelming that the future of Western civilization was at stake. Philosophers such as Max Scheler, Arnold Gehlen, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger, to name only a few, have suggested that the scientific worldview is the actual source of the crisis. Heidegger, for example, severely criticized the modern scientific civilization, especially in later works like *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

- 3 H.-G. Gadamer, "Theory, Technology, Practice: Task of the Science of Man," *Social Research* 44 (1977) 534. Also see H.-G. Gadamer, "What is Practice?" in *Reason in the Scientific Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982) 70. "In pre-scending from the primarily experienceable and familiar totality of our world," Gadamer insists, "it [science] has been developed into a knowledge of manipulable relationships by means of isolating experimentation."
- 4 Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (Oxford: University Press, 1987) 10. Rosen points out that together with Husserl and Heidegger, the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School (such as Horkheimer and Adorno) "may be given full credit for spelling out the tyrannical and positivist elements in the scientific Enlightenment."
- 5 It is therefore rather natural that, in the discussion of "postmodernity," the search for a way out from the crisis coincides with the search for a new, i.e., nonscientific, foundation for human experience, and the search for a new and better worldview. As James Olthius describes the trend, "there is a flurry of activity to refurbish old worldviews even as impassioned voices insist that only new worldviews can save our world from total collapse." As a result, today there exists "a veritable showcase of worldviews all championing their wares and charms." (James Olthius, "On Worldviews," *Christian Scholars Review*, XIV 2, 1985: 153.)
- 6 Modern philosophy is characterized by a shift of interest from metaphysical objects to the question of the method of knowledge and its certainty. For example, although English empiricists opposed Cartesian innate ideas which still maintain a speculative tenor, in so far as they also focused on the process, method, and certainty of knowledge rather than the object itself, they are also modern and Cartesian.
- 7 The term "foundationalism" is an invention of 20th Century philosophy of science. Imre Lakatos used it for the first time in discussion with Karl Popper. cf. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), and especially Lakatos's contribution, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes" (91-197, esp. 132ff.). As Jonathan Dancy points out in *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), classical foundationalism is "a research programme which sets out to show how it is that our beliefs about an external world, about science, about a past and a future, and about other minds can be justified on a base which is restricted to infallible beliefs about our sensory states. It is suggested that if we can do this, the demands of epistemology are satisfied. If not, we relapse

- into skepticism" (53f.). However, today foundationalism often points to a much broader concept than it was originally coined for. Today it refers to any attempt to provide absolutely justifiable foundations that are both universal and ultimate for scientific reasoning. Foundationalism attempts to find a method that secures theoretical certainty. Such foundations are designed to safeguard us from falling into errors in our thinking, knowing, and acting. Also, such foundations function as the intersubjective arbiter because they are objective. These ultimate foundations have often been called by different names. In the history of philosophy, common designators for the concept are "laws," "reason," "norm," "canon," "form," and "permanent neutral framework." (Cf. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 315).
- 8 H.-G. Gadamer, "The Power of Reason," in *Man and World* 3 (1970) 8f.
- 9 Robert R. Sullivan, "Introduction," to H.-G. Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, translated by Robert R. Sullivan (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985) x.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 3ff. Rosen explains well the double-sided effect of the Enlightenment in the modern era in terms of the conflict that it has created: the unique conflict between the optimistic view of science, or what he calls the "scientistic" daring and "the desire for individual and political freedom." For a complete analysis of the conflict in the Enlightenment tradition, see Herman Dooyeweerd's *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options* (Toronto: Wedge, 1979) esp. Chapter Six, "Classical Humanism," 148-174. Dooyeweerd argues that the conflict originated when "the humanistic religion of human personality in its *freedom* (from every faith that claims allegiance) and in its *autonomy* (that is, the pretension that human personality is a law unto itself)" clashed with the "control motive of autonomous man" which aims to subject "nature" and "all of its unlimited possibilities to man by means of the new method of mathematical science" (*Roots*, 149, 152).
- 12 Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 3. Rorty argues that modern people generally accepted the task of philosophy "as the attempt to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art, or religion. It purports to do this on the basis of its special understanding of the nature of knowledge and of mind. Philosophy can be foundational in respect to the rest of culture because culture is the assemblage of claims to knowledge, and philosophy adjudicates such claims." Rorty presents an excellent survey of the history of the idea of method. In *Mirror*, Rorty provides an excellent description of the process by which modern philosophy fundamentally has become the epistemology of modern science, and at the end, comes to realize the futility of its project (cf. Introduction and Chapters I-V). Rorty comes from the linguistic analysis tradition, that is, the last heir of methodological philosophy.
- 13 B.-H. Son, *Philosophy for Today* (Seoul: Jee-hak Sa, 1986) 18. Son insists that while we are attempting to evaluate contemporary thought, we are more liable to be influenced by it than any other past thoughts.
- 14 As Bob Dylan says, "something is happening here, but you don't know what it is."
- 15 Cf. Baynes, Bohman, and McCarthy, eds., *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* 1-18. The book has a valuable introduction to the development. According to the editors, representatives of the principal positions in the current end-of-philosophy debates are: (a) Poststructuralism: Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, (b) Postanalytic philosophy: Wittgenstein, Quine, Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam, Michael Dummett, Richard Rorty, (c) Hermeneutics: Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and (d) Critical Theory: Jurgen Habermas, Karl-Otto Apel. I believe there are at least three divisions within postmodernism: (1) radical critique (Derrida, Deconstruction), (2) modified rationalism (Habermas, critical theory), and (3) a moderate way (Gadamer, hermeneutics).
- 16 Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, Robert R. Sullivan's note on page 162. He also maintains that "the restoration of philosophy as an activity that uses ideas as 'hypotheses' (Natorp) or 'perspectives' (Lowith) or 'prejudices' (Gadamer) and thus makes them a part of this-worldly reality is a dominant thread in the life's work of Heidegger, Jaspers, Lowith, Gadamer, and others associated with *Existenz* philosophy in Germany. Thus their effort can be interpreted as one of overcoming the Tradition."
- 17 Klemm, *Hermeneutical Inquiry*, Vol. I, 22.
- 18 McCarthy, *et al*, *After Philosophy*, 8.
- 19 Vaden House's description of Richard Rorty's post-philosophical stand with the phrase, "no Gods or God's double," can be generally applied to postmodern thinkers. (This is the title of House's doctoral thesis on Rorty's idea of the "conversation of mankind," defended at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1992.)
- 20 As Rorty shows, this criticism highlights the dilemma between objectivism and subjectivism; hence the sense of crisis.
- 21 *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988) par. 3.
- 22 Harry Fernhout, "Response to John Cooper," in *A Reformed University in a Secularized and Pluralistic World: RUNA Conference*, March 1993, Grand Rapids, MI.
- 23 Gadamer is Professor Emeritus at the University of Heidelberg. Once a pupil of a renowned philosopher of Heidelberg, Martin Heidegger, he was called there in 1949 to succeed Karl Jaspers.
- 24 I am aware that Gadamer is a Christian from Lutheran background. Caputo also points out that there is much similarity between Gadamer's position and Christianity. He claims that "that is why Gadamerian hermeneutics is so attractive to theologians." J. Caputo, "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism," in *Development*, 260f.
- 25 H.-G. Gadamer, "Historical Transformations of Reason," in Theodore F. Geraets, ed., *Rationality To-day: Proceedings of the International Symposium on "Rationality To-day" held at the University of Ottawa, Oct. 27-30, 1977* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979) 7. Gadamer is aware that the idea of methodological reason can be traced back to the Greeks, since the idea is associated with rational thinking. He insists (Gadamer, "Theory, Technology, Practice," 533) that while the ancient Egyptian geometricians and Babylonian astronomers simply accumulated knowledge from practice, "the Greeks transformed this know-how and knowledge into a knowledge of principles and thus into demonstrable knowledge which one became aware of to enjoy for its own

- sake out of, so to speak, a primary curiosity about the world." Gadamer also notices that this is the beginning of the separation between science and its applications: theory and practice.
- 26 Caputo, "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism," in *Development*, 260.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 260f.
- 28 Klemm, "Introduction," in *Hermeneutical Inquiry*, Vol. I, 45-53.
- 29 Robert P. Scharlemann, "Being 'As Not': Overturning the Ontological." In Klemm, *Hermeneutical Inquiry*, Vol. II, 275-285. Klemm argues that the "theory of interpretation provides the epistemological grounds for showing that understanding of objective meaning is possible and for justifying the method for interpretation." This is what he, in conjunction with his mentor Robert Scharlemann, means by the phrase the "theological overturning of the theory of interpretation." Klemm argues that hermeneutics is "'overturned' by the theological depth when it encounters a meaning that cannot be integrated into the system of interpretation." Therefore, for Klemm, the task of theological hermeneutics is to reflect on "the overturning of otherness," rather than reflecting simple otherness as in hermeneutics as the theory of interpretation. Cf. *Hermeneutical Inquiry*, 45-53.
- 30 H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1989) 418-491. This includes the sections he calls "Language and Verbum" and "Language as Horizon of a Hermeneutic Ontology."
- 31 In fact, Gadamer is not the only one who comes from a Christian background and yet fails to overcome this prejudice. That is because the fusion between the Christian and Greek philosophical perspectives does not always produce a desirable result. With regard to such a fusion, Christians remember that the early history of the "apologists" had certain regrettable results. Ever since early Christian thinkers, such as Justin Martyr (c. 125-165), identified the Greek *logos*, Christian thinking has often become problematic. Because of the assumption of the commonness of *logos* for both Christians and non-Christians, theology also came under the spell of the "philosophical" prejudice of Greek classical thinking. The so-called "Logos Theology" has had many detrimental effects on the development of Christian thinking.
- 32 The Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition inherits the Christian heritage of John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Dooyeweerd. The Reformed Epistemology movement is the attempt to adopt the tradition in the spiritual *milieu* of linguistic analysis philosophy and its epistemological concerns. Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, William P. Alston and others represent the latter movement. On the other hand, Hendrik Hart, Calvin Seerveld, James Olthius, and Albert Wolters, have led Reformational Philosophy. This movement has been interested primarily in developing a culturally relevant Christian worldview.
- 33 The authors of both movements have published many articles and books on the issues of the "postmodern struggle." Besides their articles on the Christian ideas of reason in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), which represents their cooperative effort (co-edited by Hendrik Hart, Johan Van der Hoeven, and Nicholas Wolterstorff) to deal with the problem of reason, many independent works are available on postmodern issues. The best examples are Wolterstorff's *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* and Hart's *Setting Our Sights By the Morning Star*; Hart and Kai Nielsen, *Search for Community in a Withering Tradition: Conversations Between a Marxian Atheist and a Calvinian Christian* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990).
- 34 Proverbs 1:7, 9:10.
- 35 Dooyeweerd, *Roots*, 9.
- 36 Hendrik Hart, *Understanding Our World: An Integral Ontology* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984) 307.
- 37 Albert M. Wolters, "The Intellectual Milieu of Herman Dooyeweerd," in C.T. McIntire, ed., *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd*, 17.